

## **"To Spare the Conquered and Beat Down the Proud": Augustine's Theory of Politics as Sacrifice and Compassion<sup>1</sup>**

Even granted Rome's occasional great and noble moments, from its fratricidal beginnings to its massive overextension into empire the Roman motivation for glory left a path of destruction in its wake. Augustine writes that the empire's lust for domination "disturbs and consumes the human race with great ills"<sup>2</sup> and "overcame other men also, worn out and exhausted as they were by the yoke of servitude"<sup>3</sup>.

But what does he offer as an alternative? The literature on Augustine and political theory is extensive and diverse. This paper attempts to contribute to that body of literature by tying together Augustine's theology and his politics. Augustine provides us with a positive model of political action that is embedded in his theology of the Eucharist. Within the sacrifice of the Mass lies the example and the grace for all the realms of an individual's life, the political included. A reading of the *City of God* demonstrates the way that Augustine uses *miser cordia*, understood as an act of worship/sacrifice, as a litmus test for worthy human action.

This is a strong statement, possibly so strong that it appears to tend toward imprudence. In the history of Augustinian interpretation, scholars fail to agree on whether resources for political action even exist in Augustine at all. I want to make the claim that the example of mercy present in the Eucharistic sacrifice becomes the guiding political light for the new class of actors Augustine will offer, even if these actors themselves do not participate in or know of the Eucharist. Augustine's political argument is Christological; indeed, he is among the most Christological of all theologians within the Church tradition and Christ is the center of all of his thought<sup>4</sup>. It is through his meditation on Christ that we begin to understand what the positive model for political action in the *City of God* is.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a small excerpt from a much larger paper on Machiavelli's *Discourses* and Augustine's *City of God* with regard to the relationship between sacrifice, institutions and politics.

<sup>2</sup> Dyson 111

<sup>3</sup> Dyson 45

<sup>4</sup> Bonner 1987, 45

My interpretation also hinges in large part on the opposition between Augustine's conception of sacrifice and the great flaws of Roman culture: in contrast to lust for domination, Augustine's model offers mercy grounded in charity; in contrast to *apatheia* and insensitivity to the emotions and sufferings of others, he offers empathy grounded in cleaving to God; in contrast to raging pride he posits humility grounded in knowledge of our sinfulness and faith in the power of God.

In order to unveil this argument, I will begin with Augustine's own definition of sacrifice and its implications. Next, I will examine his related discussion of the Eucharist. As Bonner writes, (and this is important to remember) "not every sacrifice, in Augustine's theology, is a Eucharist; but every Eucharist is a sacrifice"<sup>5</sup>. I will review two facets of Augustine's Eucharistic theology: the Eucharist as sacrifice and the Eucharist as the principle of unity in community<sup>6</sup>. Doing so will require that I offer what seem to be opposing definitions of sacrifice offered in different sections of the *City of God*. Part of my task is to demonstrate how these seemingly vying definitions cohere into one reasonable whole. Finally, I will consider the imperative to mercy found in both Augustine's Eucharistic theology and his theory of sacrifice in relation to political action, as depicted by the examples of merciful individuals in *The City of God*.

First let us begin with two important caveats. It is necessary to recall that one of the most nuanced and beautiful aspects of Augustine's writing is his insistence on our ignorance of who constitutes the *civitas dei*<sup>7</sup>. He writes: "In this world, the two cities are indeed entangled and mingled with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment"<sup>8</sup>.

No one can be identified concretely as an enemy of God. Instead, as Canning states by citing Augustine's *Commentary on the First Letter of John*<sup>9</sup>, the Christian receives the imperative to love everyone in

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<sup>5</sup> Bonner 1991, 101

<sup>6</sup> Jackson 331

<sup>7</sup> Dyson 48-9

<sup>8</sup> Dyson 49

<sup>9</sup> "tr.10, 7 of his"

order that that person may become a brother or sister to us<sup>10</sup>. If we through our love lead them to love God, then praised be God! We can never know when this will or will not occur, so the command remains a constant one. Augustine reflected this practice of acknowledging the potential for love of Christ in each individual in his pastoral ministry in Hippo. Bonner writes, “In his pastoral dealings, the Bishop of Hippo never despaired of anyone, as long as breath remained in the body. For him, every Christian was a potential member of the City of God and every pagan a potential Christian”.<sup>11</sup> This hopeful ignorance provides latitude in Augustine’s theory to broaden his idea of political community to include the church and the unchurched, the pagan, the atheist or the Christian.

A second point to remember when interpreting Augustine is his understanding of the Fall’s effect on the ability to obtain superior happiness in this life<sup>12</sup>. The result of the Fall is the exposure of humankind to “all the great corruption that we see and feel, and so to death also”<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, while I argue that Augustine does posit an active conception of political action rooted in mercy, it is important to remember that our world is still subject to contingency, failure and ultimately death. My reading of Augustine is not utopian (as has been the recent trend among some Augustinian political scholars). I am not suggesting that Augustine envisions full-fledged political institutions that escape human error or flourishing human communities that unanimously thrive on the principle that God is love; his understanding of the political is too characterized by contingency to paint such a picture. However, he does illustrate the ways in which politics can become a force for good in the fallen world and how the Christian has a commitment to work towards that good. Nor does St. Augustine himself, though eminent, always properly apply his theoretical understanding of merciful action to concrete political or social situations. It is important to note, however, that his pastoral advice is always motivated by the intention to act with mercy.

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<sup>10</sup> Canning, 208

<sup>11</sup> Bonner 1987, 40

<sup>12</sup> Dyson 607

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

Let us begin our inquiry by considering Augustine’s theory of sacrifice, the first step in my paper. One of Augustine’s most developed discussions of sacrifice occurs in Book 10 of the *City of God*<sup>14</sup>. Augustine begins with a discussion of *latreia*, the fitting worship to God. In chapter two, he writes that *latreia* is demonstrated through sacraments or individual persons “for we are his temple, each of us and every one of us together”<sup>15</sup>. Significantly, then, our starting point in our inquiry into sacrifice bridges the gap between the individual and the community – together and as individuals we offer fittings sacrifices to God. These sacrifices include lifting our hearts to him, burning with love of him, and devoting ourselves and all our talents to him<sup>16</sup>. Sacrifices are not necessary to him, however<sup>17</sup>; instead, they purify us so that we may cling to him, which is our final good<sup>18</sup>. In clinging to him our “soul is, if one may so put it, filled up and impregnated with true virtues.”<sup>19</sup> Yet it is also an act of true love for our selves, because a person who loves himself seeks his or her own good<sup>20</sup>.

Augustine claims that through clinging to God virtue is grown within us. Moreover, the true worship of God is to cling to him and to lead one’s neighbor to do the same<sup>21</sup>. Incidentally, this also demonstrates the link between following the commandment to love God and the ability to follow the commandment to love our neighbor as our self. Augustine calls the combination of cohering to God ourselves and causing others to do the same “the worship of God...the true religion...the right piety...the service which is due to God alone.”<sup>22</sup>

It is possible to infer that these virtues imparted from our nearness to God become a part of our worship of him because they make us capable of bringing others to him. Corrigan argues that this passage in light of other passages from the *De Trinatate* shows that Augustine understood our cohering to God to allow us to recognize beauty in others and the beauty in ourselves, because in relation to God an authentic beauty emerges.

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Augustine did not really develop the concept of Christ’s suffering until the 390s. (Cavadini, 169)

<sup>15</sup> Dyson 394

<sup>16</sup> Dyson 394-5

<sup>17</sup> Dyson 396-7

<sup>18</sup> Dyson 395

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Dyson 396

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

The same may be said of the virtues<sup>23</sup>. By clinging to God, we are given the tools to love our neighbor<sup>24</sup>. In this way, the Christian's pursuit of love for God can never be individualistic; the true pursuit of union with God inevitably leads to a concern for one's community<sup>25</sup>.

Interestingly, *virtus* is used for the word "strength" when Augustine discusses the command to love God with everything we are capable of<sup>26</sup>. *Virtus* in this regard is not a tool of power subject to the *libido dominandi*; on the contrary, it is the path to virtue because in powerfully clinging to God we are equipped with the characteristics to enable us to love others. Canning interprets this passage to mean that "associated with the meaning of loving God with all one's strength, is the injunction to refrain from using that power to lord it over others and to use it rather to bring others to their only Lord."<sup>27</sup> Within Augustine's conception of sacrificial worship as anything that causes us and others to cling to God is the foil of the Roman lust for domination.

Clinging to God and receiving the love of God in order to bring others to him is a sacrifice for Augustine because it is the offering of "ourselves and his gifts in us<sup>28</sup>". Yet Augustine describes sacrifice in another way in Book 10 chapter 5: sacrifice is a broken and repenting spirit; this spirit is what the outward symbol of a sacrifice (for example, the animal offerings we find in the Old Testament) is intended to represent. Outer sacrifice does not matter if the inward sacrifice of self does not occur<sup>29</sup>. This inner sacrifice is not just a contrite spirit but a contrite spirit understood as a merciful one<sup>30</sup> because "mercy is the true sacrifice" according to Augustine's citing of Hosea 6:6<sup>31</sup>.

Another aspect of sacrifice, then, is interior contrition for one's sins and a spirit of mercy towards others that grows from the understanding of one's own limitations and failings, inspired by a contrite heart. A contrite

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<sup>23</sup> Corrigan, 105

<sup>24</sup> Canning, 64-5

<sup>25</sup> Canning, 64-5

<sup>26</sup> In a sermon, Augustine describes the Eucharist as bestowing *virtus* (Jackson 334)

<sup>27</sup> Canning, 127-8; Also see *City of God*, 14.28

<sup>28</sup> Dyson, 395

<sup>29</sup> Dyson 397

<sup>30</sup> Dyson 398

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

heart is possible through the example of the crucifixion of Christ, the sinless man who teaches sinners how to die to themselves. The crucifixion of the Lord serves as both a model for and inroad to the sacrifice of a broken heart. In *De Trinitate*, Augustine compares a repenting spirit to the crucifixion of the inner man and to the inward death of inappropriate self-love<sup>32</sup>. Christ's death is a model of sacrifice; as we meditate upon it, we inwardly undergo a purifying death to self-love and outwardly are prepared to give up our bodies in an act of martyrdom<sup>33</sup>.

Again, Augustine's understanding of sacrifice is the very opposite of Roman *libido dominandi*. Contrition is an act of humility because in order to repent one must admit error; one must acknowledge an external rule to their own will that they must live by. Moreover, if true sacrifice is mercy, mercy desires to lift others up, rather than subject them to one's own will. Finally, a contrite heart opposes the lust for domination because it is derived from the example of the greatest act of humble mercy in history, the death of sinless Jesus for the sake of sinful man.

When we act in accord with love for God and perform acts of mercy, we are offering sacrifice to God<sup>34</sup>. As Augustine says above, every action of ours can become a type of worship to God, but is it possible to imagine that all actions are types of worship of some kind, whether it be to God, evil spirits, or one's self? Demons want to be worshipped (hence the existence of paganism) because in enticing men to worship them they prevent men from making offerings of themselves to God<sup>35</sup>. Are our actions which are discontinuous with love of God acts of worship of self, or worship of evil spirits? If we grant this line of argument, we again see the polar relationship between real sacrifice and *libido dominandi*. In opposition to Christ, the demons seek worship in order to oppress the human supplicant from finding their true good; instead of leading one to cleave to God, they are deliberately frustrating another's relationship with God. All acts of domination of another are instances

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<sup>32</sup> Cavadini, 177

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Dyson, 399

<sup>35</sup> Dyson 421-2b

of denying them the conditions for their flourishing. All sin is a frustration of union with God, and hence a prevention of real sacrifice, so acts of sin could be conceived of as acts of inappropriate worship – either worship of evil forces or worship of one’s self and one’s own will.

Combining the two meanings of sacrifice (**first understood as** cleaving to God/leading others to cleave to him and **secondly understood as** offering acts of mercy/contrition), Augustine writes that “a true sacrifice, then, is every work done in order that we may draw near to God in holy fellowship: done, that is, with reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed...even the mercy which we extend to men is not a sacrifice if it is not given for God’s sake”<sup>36</sup>. Yet he is not through defining the meaning of sacrifice.

In Book 10 chapter 6, Augustine takes these two properties of sacrifice and begins exploring their Christological and Eucharistic explanations. His argument is complex but important. The shift in his presentation of sacrifice from discussions of goal-directed actions toward heavy theological concepts such as the Body of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist is quick and compact. Granting that works of mercy directed toward complete union with God are sacrifice, Augustine next claims it consequently follows that all of the City of God becomes a sacrifice to God through the person of Christ the High Priest who “offered even Himself for us in the form of servant, so that we might be the body of so great a head”<sup>37</sup>. This offering through the person of Christ becomes “the sacrifice of Christians” and is evident to this day in the “sacrament of the altar”<sup>38</sup>.

Augustine makes three leaps in this passage: from the definition of sacrifice as works of mercy in instances of cleaving to God and leading others to him, to the person of Christ as mediator and victim and finally to the existence of the redeemed City as the body of Christ, one with the offering of Christ. How does he substantiate this?

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<sup>36</sup> Dyson 399

<sup>37</sup> Dyson 400

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

The answer is found in the nature of Christ. Cavadini claims that it is the unity of Christ's two natures, representative of his solidarity with the plight of mankind and under the form of a historical person, that makes Augustine's understanding of suffering operate<sup>39</sup>. In Chapter 20 of Book 10 Augustine explains that Christ is at once priest, victim, servant and God. As God he is the recipient of the sacrifice of the Mass, but with the humility of a servant he chose to be the victim in the offering. Moreover, because we know from the Scriptures that we are members of the body of Christ<sup>40</sup>, when he is offered as a sacrifice we are offered as well because we are a part of him and he is the victim. Similarly, we are also a part of his body as he performs the actions of a priest. In this way, we are at once God's most "wonderful and best sacrifice"<sup>41</sup> and also pupils of Christ in how to offer ourselves to God – "for the Church, being the body of which He is the Head, is taught to offer herself through Him"<sup>42</sup>. It is the will of Christ that "there should be a daily sign of this in the sacrament of the Church's sacrifice"<sup>43</sup>, the daily Mass. This passage is where Augustine offers yet one more definition of sacrifice – the daily sacrifice of the Mass becomes "the supreme and true sacrifice all false sacrifices have yielded"<sup>44</sup>.

An exegesis of Book 10 leaves us with three definitions of sacrifice. Sacrifice is the act of cleaving to God and leading others to cleave toward him. The fruits of mercy grow in our hearts when we unite ourselves to God and hence we are able to perform the second definition of worship, acts of mercy performed with a contrite spirit. Finally, sacrifice is Christ's self-offering as both priest and victim, wherein the people of God are offered to the Lord because they are parts of his body. This sacrifice is the sacrifice that takes place in the Eucharist.

Yet how does Augustine reconcile all these claims with one another, especially since it appears that deeds of mercy like almsgiving or leading others to God are not the same as ritual sacrifice? In Book X the

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<sup>39</sup> Cavadini 175

<sup>40</sup> Philipians 2:7 cited in Dyson 400

<sup>41</sup> Dyson 959

<sup>42</sup> Dyson, 422

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Dyson 422



“supreme and true sacrifice”<sup>45</sup> is still a rite shared by a community rather than a more conventional act of mercy such as feeding the poor or burying the dead.

Augustine’s response again lies in the unity of priest and victim in the person of Jesus Christ. The daily sacrifice of the Mass is the sign of Christ’s offering of himself to the Father for the expiation of sins which he did not commit, the ultimate act of mercy in the Christian tradition. Adding another dimension, Augustine extends the offering of Christ in the Eucharist to an offering of self, as the Christian members forming the body of Christ are offered up to God with him in the sign of Christ’s merciful deed during the Mass<sup>46</sup>. In this way, the ritual sacrifice is a symbolic representation of love of God and neighbor<sup>47</sup>, both in the person of Christ and in the Christian Communities *participation* in the merciful deed, not just their *reception* of its benefits.

It follows that a connection exists between the central sacrifice of the Mass and the conforming of Christian hearts toward acts of mercy. Augustine quotes St. Paul from his letter to the Hebrews which warns believers “To do good and to communicate<sup>48</sup>, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”<sup>49</sup>.

Performing acts of mercy and participating in the daily Mass are both pleasing to the Lord, and even a merciful act becomes a sacrifice of praise and an act of worship to God. In fact, one may assume that the two are connected. As the Christian communicant participating in the Mass is offered as a member of the body of Christ, he is also transformed by Christ’s atonement on his behalf, receiving the grace of Christ’s sacrifice in his or her soul. The more the communicant is open to the grace of Christ, the more they are conformed to him. Hence, they are better capable of performing merciful acts because of their participation in the most merciful act in all of history.

The sacrifice of the Mass as a cleaving to God causes the fruit of merciful acts to be grown in the participants hearts – they are “impregnated with the virtues” as mentioned earlier. In this way, they can nourish

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Dyson 422

<sup>47</sup> Dyson, 398

<sup>48</sup> In this context, a term for receiving communion.

<sup>49</sup> Dyson 398

and tend to all of those around them. Similarly, they are more and more conformed in unity with one another. Again, the importance of community and sacrifice comes to the forefront in Augustine. An explanation from a sermon to the newly baptized during Easter demonstrates the way Augustine envisioned the sacrifice. Prior to their entry into the church, they were disparate grains “threshed” when they heard the Gospel and stored away during their period as catechumens. Exorcism and fasting ground them, the water of baptism made them dough and confirmation in the Holy Spirit baked them into a loaf of bread, together.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the wine is also a symbol of the faithful’s unity because they are like grapes pressed together to make a wine<sup>51</sup>. In this way, they are the body of Christ as we are told in Philippians, but they are also the body of Christ present on the altar<sup>52</sup>.

Besides unifying the faithful, the Eucharist also sanctifies their offerings of deeds of mercy. Given fallen human nature, no merciful act is performed without some purpose beside union with God, whether it be union for ourselves or another. The Eucharist makes up for this short coming, by forming us into the body of Christ, which is itself the very compassion of God<sup>53</sup>.

Now that we are familiar with Augustine’s complete definition of sacrifice, we are prepared to understand most fully how his definition completely challenges the *libido dominandi*. It is appropriate to quote Cavadini at length here<sup>54</sup>:

When we act out of compassion toward a neighbor, and our compassion is progressively formed by our participation in the Eucharist, we are reclaiming that neighbor from the identity the empire would impose, as simply another vehicle for its glory. We are reinvesting the world, and each creature in it, with the glory of God, and so the character of compassion as *latreia* or worship of God is vindicated. Our devotion to Christ, visible outwardly as works of mercy, becomes a practice of critique, a dismantling of the body politic’s hegemony over meaning or, at least, over opinion

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<sup>50</sup> Jackson 331-2

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Cavadini, 185

<sup>54</sup> Cavadini, 186

The Eucharist is the ultimate example of an act of mercy – the torture and death of the sinless for the sinful, a sacrifice offered in perfect obedience and humility. Inspired by reception of the Eucharist and the example of Christ, we can liberate people from the oppression of estrangement from Christ and teach them that their identity and salvation is in Christ, not the state; through act of mercy, we can demonstrate justice understood as “the glory of God over all”.<sup>55</sup> The lust for domination is replaced by the proper worship of God, which is also the true sacrifice – the pouring out of self in compassion for the good of another.

Earlier, I maintained that Augustine not only offered a conception of sacrifice but also a model for human action in the members of the City of God. An important function of Augustine’s apologetic work is his identification of heroism in the person of Christ and a recognition of authentic heroism in historical Romans. Let us turn to these heroes as examples of Augustine’s theory of sacrifice in practice.

His understanding is especially developed in opposition to Pelagianism<sup>56</sup>, a heresy which evidenced the pride at the root of every evil for Augustine. The human hero for Augustine is an actor whose humility grows out of an understanding of their own failures and their dependence on Christ for grace to commit heroic deeds;<sup>57</sup> it is rooted in the contrite spirit that is necessary to Augustine’s theory of sacrifice.

I will offer five textual examples to buttress my argument about sacrifice as action in *City of God*, three pre-Christian and two post-Incarnation. These examples are rooted in Augustine’s understanding of compassion and emotions, which I will also detail. It is important to note that Augustine’s account of emotion models the purification that takes place in his account of sacrifice; when the human turns to God as their object, their capacity to love themselves and others is purified. A substantial part of this is the training of their emotions to respond properly to different objects, and to find motivation in these emotions for the performance of compassionate deeds.

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<sup>55</sup> Cavadini 186

<sup>56</sup> Dodarro 142

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

Harding claims that the earliest books in the *City of God* confine themselves to pagan examples so he can present his arguments to non-Christians<sup>58</sup>. Augustine finds Alexander the Great an insufficient model of heroism<sup>59</sup>; he even rejects Regulus in some sense because he critiques him for an excessive desire for glory that caused him to be too harsh with the Carthaginians<sup>60</sup>. The two models of pre-Christan action that he upholds are both committed by women: the first instance features the Sabine women; the second discusses the sister of the Horatii.

In Book III, Augustine chronicles the audacity of the Romans who forcibly carried off the Sabine women. Afterwards, horrible battles ensue between these women's family members and their new husbands, who, "imbued with the blood of fathers wrest embraces from their sorrowing daughters"<sup>61</sup>. Augustine contrasts the Roman lust for domination with the intercession of the Sabine women for the sake of peace. Augustine writes "the evil day would not have ended even there, had not the ravished women dashed out with flying hair and, flinging themselves down before their fathers, stilled their just anger not by force of arms, but with pious supplication<sup>62</sup>". The women, forgetting their pride, their anger, and their desire to be reunited with their families, beg their fathers to bring peace and stop fighting. The father's love for the daughters allowed them to put aside their righteous anger and desire for revenge to honor their daughters' request. Ultimately Romulus, who had even killed his own brother in order not to share kingly rule, was put in the political position of accepting the king of the Sabines as joint ruler<sup>63</sup>.

A briefer example is found in the sister of the Horatii. The worth of this example, however, is Augustine's praise for this woman. Augustine recounts the terrible fight between two sets of three brothers, the

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<sup>58</sup> Harding, 113

<sup>59</sup> Harding (2008)

<sup>60</sup> Dyson 124

<sup>61</sup> Dyson 109

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Dyson 110

Horatii and the Curiatii, citizens of mother-daughter cities<sup>64</sup> embroiled in a war. The unnamed sister of the Horatii was engaged to one of the Curiatii; her brother returned victorious, carrying the shield of her betrothed because he had killed him. Upon seeing the shield, the girl began to cry. Her brother immediately killed her for weeping. Augustine breaks with his angry and passionate characterization of Roman action to praise her, saying, “to my mind, this one woman who showed such affection, had more humanity than the entire Roman people.”<sup>65</sup>

Finally, a powerful expression of Augustine’s attitude toward proper action is found in his criticism of those who claim to practice *apatheia*, the absence of emotion. Augustine considers this to be the most depraved vice<sup>66</sup>. Whereas one can speculate that at least in the example of the Sabine women their proper use of emotion and their willingness to beg for mercy may stem from humility, tremendous pride spurs on those who pursue *apatheia* as the absence of emotion<sup>67</sup>. According to Augustine, such people actually destroy their very humanity by divorcing themselves from emotion<sup>68</sup>. Those who practice this type of *apatheia* are as enthralled by the *libido dominandi* as the Roman rapists of the Sabine women; in seeking to dominate their emotion, they render themselves incapable of recognizing or valuing the emotional state of others. Their disinterest and lack of sensitivity prevent them from acts of mercy because of a cruel indifference, not because of the revolting grasping lust that we find in the Roman abusers of the Sabines. All the same, Augustine considers their coldness just as destructive.

The contrast between the Roman rapists and the practitioners of *apatheia* when compared to the Horatii woman and the Sabine women embodies the distinction we witness in Augustine’s conception of sacrifice detailed above. The former are enslaved by lust for domination, the latter perform acts of mercy which are the

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<sup>64</sup> Dyson 111

<sup>65</sup> Dyson 111

<sup>66</sup> Dyson 600

<sup>67</sup> Dyson 602

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

fitting sacrifice of God. Note that in this account, it is the proper channeling of emotion and empathy for the plight of the downtrodden that allows the women to act as they do.

The two post-Incarnation examples are also interesting. The most explicit model is found in St. Paul. According to Dodaro, Paul is the only person Augustine describes as an *optimus vir*, a “best citizen”<sup>69</sup> and the foremost character in Augustine’s reconfiguring of heroism<sup>70</sup>. Dodaro interprets Augustine to posit St. Paul in opposition to the noble yet hubristic Ciceronian statesman<sup>71</sup>.

Paul is depicted first and foremost as an acknowledger of his own sin, a man who performs the act of sacrifice of a contrite spirit<sup>72</sup>. His admission of weakness is the opposite of the Roman hero’s great machismo<sup>73</sup>. In fact, Augustine presents Paul’s confession of sin as a prerequisite for justice in his person<sup>74</sup>. Augustine writes of the relationship between Paul’s emotion and his performance of merciful deeds: he rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps for those who weep<sup>75</sup>. He longs to be with Christ and experiences anxiety over internal and external turmoil in this life<sup>76</sup>. He misses his friends in Rome; he fears for the Corinthians’ purity with ardent jealousy and finally, he suffers for the separation of his Jewish brothers and sisters from Christ<sup>77</sup>. Augustine says that Paul’s “emotions and affections...come from love of the good and from holy charity”<sup>78</sup>, though his

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<sup>69</sup> Dodaro 148-9

<sup>70</sup> See Dodaro 148: “Yet although Augustine is certain that Christian rulers will find in Christ the supreme model of civic virtue and eloquence, he also recognizes that Christ’s virtue cannot be fully imitated, because the source of his virtue, the unity between his divine and human natures, is unique to him. Moreover, Christ can never provide an example of contrition for sins or prayer for pardon. Instead, Augustine suggests that examples of this kind are given by the saints, whose struggle with the effects of original sin makes them fitting models of civic virtue in ways that Christ cannot be. For these reasons, Augustine contends in his political writings that many saints, both Old Testament figures such as Job and David, and those who follow Christ, such as Peter and Paul, offer statesmen of his own day an alternative model of civic virtue to that of Cicero’s *optimates*”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Dodaro 149

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Dyson 598

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Dyson 599

grief and fear are emotions only possible for the redeemed in earthly life<sup>79</sup>. Still, if we experienced no emotions while on earth in the proper sense that Paul displays, we would be living unrighteous lives<sup>80</sup>.

Another example of a Christian actor that is significant to our inquiry is Emperor Theodosius. Augustine extols him for offering sacrifices of merciful acts. After praising him for his mercy to the sons of his enemies and to the boy Valentinian, Augustine recounts that Theodosius went back on a promise of clemency out of human weakness<sup>81</sup>. Augustine is displeased by his failure in mercy, which is the attribute he is primarily praised for in this text. However, Theodosius commits another act of sacrifice when he publicly repents for his failure in mercy; he demonstrates the sacrifice of a contrite spirit<sup>82</sup>.

Both of these actors perform acts of sacrifice by demonstrating a contrite spirit and committing acts of mercy. In the case of St. Paul we witness most closely the link between purified human emotion and acts of sacrifice. Augustine's account of emotion in light of his theory of sacrifice explains how this is so.

Augustine writes in Book 14 that the four emotions of desire, joy, grief and fear are essentially acts of will in response to an object<sup>83</sup>. Desire is an endeavor after that which we hope for; joy is our enjoyment of our satisfied desire; fear is our concern for a possible situation that has not come to pass, and grief is our response to a situation that we wish was not occurring.<sup>84</sup> The quality of our emotions can be judged according to the quality of our will; if our will is fixed on love of God our emotions will be healthy, necessary and appropriate. However, if our will is not trained on God for our object our emotions will be disordered.<sup>85</sup>

Using the resources provided by Augustine's theory of sacrifice, let us analyze Augustine's account of emotions oriented by the will to a proper love. Another way of putting this is that as we cleave to God as our object (and hence perform an act of sacrifice), he becomes the object of our will. Not only are the virtues born

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Dyson 599

<sup>81</sup> Dyson 234-5

<sup>82</sup> Dyson 235

<sup>83</sup> Dyson 590

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Dyson 592

in our heart because of this cleaving, but our emotions will be purified as well, so that we may experience “compassion” or “fellow-feeling” in our hearts for the plight of another<sup>86</sup>. This compassion, in turn, plays a role in our performance of acts of mercy. This follows from Augustine’s definition of sacrifice. Finally, in the post-Incarnation world participation in the Eucharist, the ultimate cleaving to God, conforms the recipient to the person of Christ, so that they will what Christ wills. Given a broad understanding of the grace imparted by Christ’s sacrifice, instantiated and participated in the Catholic Mass, it is possible to imagine that even all acts of mercy, whether or not they are performed by those who assent to the doctrine of the Eucharist, find the source for their strength in the sacrifice of Christ.

Augustine’s definition of sacrifice in conjunction with his explanation of and praise for compassion becomes the template for his political philosophy. I would like to conclude by proposing two caveats. The first is that significant work needs to be done to examine the role of practical reason granted this understanding of political action in Augustine. The second is that this is only a starting point, however, and the writings of Augustine are prolific. It is my hope that through analyzing the role of sacrifice as compassion in Augustine, a positive model of political action emerges in Augustine that escapes accusations of abject passivity or other-worldly resignation. Far from teaching the Christian to be a compliant witness of injustice, the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Christ that it demonstrates inspires a Christian to “prefer justice over power” and “recover [others’] birthright in the image of God”<sup>87</sup>; it teaches the true path to political action in the conjunction of the institution of sacrifice and the conforming of heroic actors to that sacrifice.

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<sup>86</sup> Dyson 365

<sup>87</sup> Cavadini 186



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